



NJDOE News

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Task Force Finds Significant Progress in Asbury Park School District

Commissioner of Education David C. Hespe today commended the Asbury Park school system for the significant strides it has made since July 1998, when in response to concerns voiced by residents the department sent a special task force to the district to help resolve a growing list of problems.

Dr. Vito A. Gagliardi, a special assistant to the commissioner who headed the task force, presented to the Asbury Park Board of Education last night a semi-final report that gave the district high marks for the progress.

"The school board and administration should be proud of the accomplishments it has made," Hespe said. "There is still some more work to be done, but Asbury Park deserves kudos for the commitment it has made to improve school operations and educational opportunities for the children it serves. Dr. Gagliardi's report demonstrates how problems can be solved quickly and amicably when state and local officials agree to work in a collaborative manner."

"A spirit of cooperation and a sincere desire to improve the schools prevails among the board of education and the staff," said Dr. Gagliardi. "The interim superintendent has taken decisive steps to develop an organization table, increase the number of qualified applicants for positions, provide curriculum and professional development, improve attendance and dropout rates, and engage parents in the learning experience."

The task force focused its attention on six areas critical to the function of the school district: governance, administration, central office activities, curriculum development, school operations and special education. It issued a preliminary report in December 1998 that recommended a series of actions the district could take to improve each area. Since then, the task force has been working with local officials to help them implement the recommendations through compliance review, technical assistance and mentoring. The semi-final report praises the district for making considerable progress in all areas.

Among the findings of the report are:

- The Asbury Park Board of Education has made a commendable effort to understand the basic problems that plague the district. Improved communications, a willingness to consider different options, the recognition of the need for leadership and a greater sense of direction are principal factors in helping the board become a more effective force in the operation of the district.
- Leadership in the district has improved significantly since the appointment of a new interim superintendent, a new high school principal, a new director of pupil personnel services, a new director of special services, and a new director for its computer center.
- The current board of education now conducts business-like meetings, functions as a policy-making body and respects input by the public. Members exhibit attention to concerns and have the best interest of the children in mind when making decisions. Decorum exists even when there is disagreement on issues.
- All school buildings have been thoroughly inspected for adherence to code requirements.
- All teachers are now required to prepare lesson plans.
- A significant number of special education concerns in the district such as over-classification, establishment of an inappropriate special education "alternative school" and other procedural problems are being corrected. The special education curriculum is aligned with the state's core curriculum content standards.
- The district has greatly improved in-service training for school teams, including non-professional members, in order to prepare for the Whole School Reform process.

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